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**County Executive Scott Walker  
2009 Budget Address  
September 25, 2008**

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Chairman Holloway, members of the County Board, Constitutional Officers and – most importantly – fellow citizens of Milwaukee County, it is my honor to present our 2009 county budget.

Last spring, I ran for reelection on a bold agenda to improve public safety and protect core services – all without adding to the taxpayers' burden. I am proud to say that this budget fulfills that aggressive agenda by transforming our government today so that it can sustain important services tomorrow. This budget represents the next wave of reform.

When we first arrived here six years ago, the county government was nearly bankrupt. Pensions, sick leave benefits and years of fiscal mismanagement had left the county in dire straits. While we still have significant challenges, today, we are headed in the right direction.

Since 2002, our debt is down 10% and our workforce has decreased 23%. These changes, along with reforms throughout our government, led the national ratings firms to improve the status of our bond rating. And in 2007, together, we finished the year with a \$7.9 million surplus.

As Chairman Holloway knows, I mentioned these facts at our meetings with the bond rating agencies and acknowledged that this was a great team effort. It shows that our reforms are working.

Interestingly, during the same six years over in Madison, the state bond rating was lowered, and the target of cutting 10,000 jobs in eight years is some 75% short. On top of that, Wisconsin now has one of the largest GAAP (Generally Accepted Accounting Principles) deficits in the country.

While state government failed to address its serious fiscal problems, we worked together to get our financial house in order. And our reforms are working.

To continue this positive trend, our budget transforms the way we deliver services so we can sustain important programs far into the future. And we do it while protecting taxpayers with the 7<sup>th</sup> straight budget that does not raise the property tax levy from the previous year.

Through key reforms, we make government work better for less. Let's examine a few of these reforms:

**We make bold reforms in this budget that transform the way we insure public safety in our county.**

Specifically, we propose that all of the corrections functions in the county be consolidated under the authority of the Sheriff. I want to personally thank Sheriff David Clarke for his leadership on this important reform.

The jail, House of Correction and Huber facility will all be under the supervision of our chief law enforcement official in the county. This will improve public safety.

We also propose a new system of universal screening to insure that all criminal justice agencies collect and share the same information about offenders. This is a product of the leadership of the Community Justice Council.

Earlier this year, Attorney General J.B. Van Hollen helped our DA create a new program to protect witnesses so that they are not intimidated by criminals who don't want them to testify in court. We make that program permanent in this budget.

In addition to District Attorney John Chisholm, I want to specifically thank Maurice Pulley. He is a dedicated county employee and union official and he is also the father of Maurice Pulley, Jr.

Mr. Pulley's son died last year. He was witness to a violent crime and the thugs who committed the crime gunned him down to keep him from testifying against them.

Mr. Pulley never backed down and pushed for a new program to help protect witnesses. Mr. Pulley, I want to thank you for your courage and for your dedication to making sure that other families do not have to go through what you did last year.

**We make bold reforms in this budget that transform the way we care for those in need in our county.**

John Wagner, who is 40 years old, lives with his mother, Joan Wagner, and requires considerable assistance including help with all of his daily personal care needs. John's father, Terry Wagner, died last year of heart disease and John's brother has been helping to provide for John's care.

John has been on the waiting list for services since 1994 and is waiting for residential services to provide the help he needs.

In this budget, we propose to eliminate those waiting lists by expanding Family Care to people under the age of 60 with developmental and physical disabilities. We eliminated the waiting lists for older adults and we will do it again for people with disabilities. And, we continue to expand the number of older adults who are enrolled in the current Family Care program.

Today, I ask you to allow us to negotiate for a state-of-the-art mental health facility on the site of the former St. Michael Hospital, and to sell the land on the county grounds so we have a funding source to sustain mental health services for years to come.

We asked the developer to sharpen his pencil on this project and he did. This greatly reduced the cost to Milwaukee County. It is clear that building our own structure will cost considerably more, result in more delays and shift significant financial risks to the County.

Mental health advocates understand that the time to act is now. Prolonged debate and delay comes at the expense of the clients we serve and the dedicated staff that work hard day in and day out providing quality care in a facility that has outlived its useful purpose. Let's get this job done!

Finally, we create an exciting program called New Freedom in this budget. It opens the door to people who are Paratransit eligible so they can ride the bus for free. Not only does this save the county money, this reform will actually help individuals gain new levels of independence. It was a team effort, but I want to particularly thank Don Natzke for his passion as we put together this dynamic reform.

**We make bold reforms in this budget that transform the way we provide quality of life programs in the county.**

In this budget, we add 26,000 hours of labor in the parks and provide the Park's Director with the flexibility to bring on staff during the times when people are actually using the system. We open a new aquatic center in Lincoln Park and improve our Park assets by taking all of the bathrooms and playgrounds that have failing grades and replace them

in 2009. We also set out to create up to 10 new dog parks and to keep Bradford Beach open again next summer.

This budget continues to improve our attractions at the zoo and maintains our commitment to the public museum, war memorial, art museum and other cultural assets. We see their value to the community and our support must continue.

The national convention for the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) was in town last week. The AZA just completed the accreditation of our zoo and they gave us very high marks. I do too.

In addition to our fine staff at the zoo, I want to thank our partner - the Zoological Society of Milwaukee and their many generous benefactors - for their tremendous support. US Bank Wisconsin Market President Bill Bertha is a great supporter of the zoo and I want to publicly thank Bill for his leadership in building the US Bank Gathering Place. This is one of the more than \$70 million worth of new capital investments at the zoo since the last AZA convention held in Milwaukee in 1988, and the society played the lead role in raising those funds. And I thank them.

A recent survey by the Public Policy Forum showed that our zoo and parks receive the highest ratings for customer satisfaction. This budget recognizes that high level of interest and support and makes further improvements in the Parks and Zoo.

**We make bold reforms in this budget that transform how we use transportation in our county.**

Even though the high price of gas drove up the cost of fuel for the transit system by \$6 million, we propose passing on less than \$2 million of those costs through fares and we insure that all of our bus routes remain intact for 2009. No routes will be cut and there will be no cutbacks in service for Paratransit riders.

Looking to the future, we move forward with a Bus Rapid Transit plan that will improve and upgrade our current bus system. Our budget includes the resources we need to submit an application to the federal government for funding to start a Bus Rapid Transit line from the northwest side, along Fond du Lac Avenue to downtown Milwaukee and back along National Avenue to the southwest side.

This new line can move forward regardless of the lack of positive action by the Mayor over the \$91.5 million for transit improvements. On this issue, you - the county board - and I are united, as we believe that these funds should be spent to improve and upgrade the existing bus system – not to create a new city system that will drain dollars away from the county transit system.

In addition, I propose that we put in place a process to prepare for a bid to lease the operations of our airport. Mitchell International is very well run. In fact, we just announced another record-breaking month – the 16th consecutive month of record-breaking growth at the airport.

The positive news at Mitchell is exactly what will make it attractive to potential bidders in the future.

If successful, contracting out operations would provide a steady revenue stream to the county. These funds should then be used to support and improve transit in our county - and throughout our region - for years to come. And we can do it without raising another tax.

Chicago is doing something similar even as we speak. The city got more than \$1.3 billion several years ago for the Skyway Toll Bridge. Bids for Midway Airport are now being received this week. We should move forward with a plan to see if it can work in Milwaukee too.

On top of that, this budget aggressively improves our roads, highways, bridges and parkways.

**We make bold reforms in how we run government in this budget so we can maintain core services while we protect the taxpayers.**

In this budget, we propose contracting out \$9.8 million worth of programs and services. I said many times during the last election that county government could either be an employment service or a provider of key services to people in the community. I pick the latter.

So far, we have plenty of successes in partnering with groups for things like Family Care - which is drawing national attention for the quality of our care – and in many other areas of human services, transportation and infrastructure.

From getting more help for people in need by using Impact 211 operators who will handle our call centers, to adding 26,000 more hours of labor in the parks by shifting from year-round to seasonal employees, we transform our workforce to sustain or improve core services – all without adding to the burden of our taxpayers.

This budget turns to partnership contracts to maintain core services while keeping jobs within the county, just not necessarily with county government. These decisions lead to long-term sustainability for the county.

Changes in the use of our workforce and resources – along with a major reorganization – lead to a reform budget that truly transforms government. This is a budget that does more with less and presents a way to sustain vital services for years to come.

In total, the government reforms I propose in the budget will save this County over \$27 million dollars next year and every year thereafter. If we are to sustain our core functions and ensure quality services, we must be bold.

Now, more than ever, I ask the members of the County Board to consider the choices before us today. Do you embrace reform and provide core services through new and innovative ways to protect the taxpayer? Or, do you cling to the status quo and reduce the ability to provide core services in the future while adding to the burden of local taxpayers?

I choose to protect the taxpayers and I choose to embrace reform. I hope you will too.